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RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1716  
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RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 7658  
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0855  
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 5684  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000467

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SUBJECT: PARTISAN POLITICS UNDERLIES COMMEMORATIONS OF THE  
"228 INCIDENT"

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,  
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Over the past several days, President Chen used a series of speeches commemorating the tragic February 28, 1947 Incident as a vehicle to attack the KMT, including the late Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT's leading presidential contender for 2008, Ma Ying-jeou. Chen linked the current DPP election issue of "ill-gotten KMT party assets" to the "228 Incident" and argued that Ma does not have "the moral standard to be the leader of a country." In addition to participating in "228" activities, Ma published an article urging the people to reject DPP efforts to create divisions between Taiwanese and Mainlanders for election purposes. This divisive issue is clearly going to figure in DPP campaigning for upcoming Legislative Yuan (LY) and presidential elections, though it is unclear at this stage how the voting masses will respond. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Several days of often partisan ceremonies commemorating the 60th anniversary of the "228 Incident" wound up on February 28 with the dedication of a new national "228" Memorial Museum (in a Japanese-era building used by USIS for many years), the issuance of the first stamp bearing the name "Taiwan" rather than "ROC Postal Administration," an official memorial ceremony in Taipei, and two outdoor concerts. Commemorative activities were also held in other cities throughout the island on February 28. Accompanied by other top Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) leaders, President Chen Shui-bian delivered speeches at the museum dedication and the central government's formal ceremony. On the same day, former Kuomintang (KMT) Chairman and announced presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou participated in "228" ceremonies in Tainan County, the President's home district. While DPP leaders have suggested there will be more "228" activities throughout the coming year, they have not said what those activities will be.

Note: The "228 Incident"

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¶3. (C) The "228 Incident" (February 28, 1947) began with an altercation between government agents and a peddler suspected of selling smuggled cigarettes, which exploded into a popular uprising against KMT local government corruption and repression. Although tensions appeared to be calming

somewhat, Governor Chen Yi persuaded KMT strongman Chiang Kai-shek to send troops to suppress opponents of the government. Arriving in early March, these troops indiscriminately killed thousands of Taiwanese (the numbers are a subject of controversy), including some very prominent members of the Taiwanese elite, in their quest to regain complete control. Subsequently, Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan in 1949, the government imposed martial law until 1987, and "228" became a forbidden topic for almost four decades. Following the lifting of martial law, the KMT government began taking steps to address the Incident and make some financial restitution to the families of victims.

President Chen  
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¶4. (C) Over the past several days, President Chen used a series of "228" speeches to attack former KMT strongman Chiang Kai-shek, the KMT, and presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou. Chen claimed that a report issued last year provided evidence proving that Chiang Kai-shek was the "prime culprit" of "228." Therefore, Chen stated, the government should continue steps to downgrade Chiang, including moving his remains from a ceremonial resting place to a military cemetery and turning the Chiang Kai-shek memorial in downtown Taipei to another use. Chen linked the 1947 incident to the follow-on decades of "White Terror" and martial law and called for the investigation of the perpetrators of human rights violations in both periods. In articles and speeches, some other DPP leaders urged the KMT to open its party archives to reveal more about the truth of "228."

¶5. (C) Without referring by name to Ma Ying-jeou, Chen directed his strongest barbs at the KMT leader. Chen

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rejected Ma's interpretation of "228" as "a popular uprising against official repression," arguing that the incident was a "massacre" and a "persecution of democracy and human rights" by an outside party-government dictatorial regime. Noting that former KMT President Lee Teng-hui had apologized for "228," Chen said the KMT also owed the people an apology for the following 38 years of martial law (1949-87) and for the party-state system's injustices, especially the KMT's accumulation of vast "unjust" assets, which should be returned to the people. Chen charged Ma with being two-faced, apologizing for "228" but rushing to sell off party assets at bargain-basement prices. According to Chen, Ma's behavior indicates that he "absolutely lacks the moral standard to lead a country." In addition to Chen's speeches, the DPP launched other attacks on Ma. For example, a sign prominently displayed at the entrance to a Green-sponsored "228" choral concert read, "Taipei Mayor (Ma Ying-jeou) is an embezzler, knave."

Ma Ying-jeou  
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¶6. (C) The KMT and Ma held a number of commemorative events with family members of 228 victims in the run-up to February 28. On February 28, Ma also participated in a Tainan County government ceremony. The DPP County Magistrate complemented Ma for courage in attending an event in President Chen's home county and then berated him over the issue of KMT party assets, which he said should be used to pay compensation to the families of "228" victims. Ma defended himself and suggested that Chiang Kai-shek was acting in his government and military, rather than KMT, capacity in ordering steps to pacify Taiwan. In the evening, DPP supporters heckled Ma for "putting on a show" as he visited an outdoor pro-Green pop concert. At the concert, Ma refused to sign a "Transitional Justice Declaration" prepared by event organizers on the grounds that it did not acknowledge past efforts by the KMT government to address the "228 Incident." This declaration was signed by DPP leaders, former President Lee Teng-hui, and even KMT Legislative Yuan Speaker Wang Jin-pyng.

17. (C) Ma Ying-jeou, who expected attacks from President Chen and other DPP leaders, participated in a series of KMT "228" commemorative activities over the past several days. In addition Ma published a signed article in the pro-Blue United Daily News on February 28, entitled, "Five Promises on 228: Do we hand down to our children 60 years of hatred or a hopeful future? Ma urged the people to promise to say no to DPP efforts to divide ethnic groups (Taiwanese and Mainlanders) for election purposes, to combat DPP corruption, and to work to sign a peace agreement and open direct links with the Mainland, in order to allow Taiwan to become an open and maturing "island." On the ethnic issue, Ma argued rather emotionally that it is time to stop labeling people as Mainlanders. On corruption, Ma linked the 1947 protests against corrupt officials to the recent "Red Shirt Movement" against corruption in the DPP leadership.

18. (C) While most of the "228" events over the past several days were distinctly partisan, KMT Taichung Mayor Jason Hu succeeded in holding a simple but moving tree planting ceremony in a harmonious atmosphere that was unmarred by political rhetoric. Some prominent public figures, including former DPP Chairman Lin Yi-hsiung, have urged politicians not to use "228" for divisive political purposes.

Comment

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19. (C) President Chen and other DPP leaders are using the "228" incident as a political weapon to try to discredit the KMT in the eyes of the Taiwanese public and to undermine support for Ma Ying-jeou. To increase the effects, the party is now trying to broaden the meaning of "228" to include the subsequent period (1949-87) of KMT authoritarian rule and also the current issue of KMT party assets. The DPP hopes to schedule a referendum on recovering "ill-gotten KMT party assets" to coincide with the 2008 presidential election. The February 28 outdoor choral concert featured a drive to collect signatures needed to put the referendum on the

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ballot. Over the coming year, the DPP will probably launch a number of election gambits aimed at keeping Ma and the KMT off-balance and on the defensive. The KMT is charging the DPP with playing politics and undermining ethnic harmony between Taiwanese and Mainlanders. They may hope that the voters will see them as reasonable and forward-looking in contrast to a backward-looking, ideological DPP.  
YOUNG